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Cultural Competency in Federal Environmental Justice and Public Participation Programs

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DoD Installation and Environment Program Vision and Mission

"Reduce the total ownership costs of the military infrastructure while providing the Nation with military installations that efficiently support the warfighter in achieving military dominance, ensure superior living and working conditions, and enhance the safety of the force and the quality of the environment. " (DUSD(I&E) Website, February 2004).

Vision and Mission Success

- Environmental Justice (EJ) and Public Participation programs are a necessary and key ingredient for success

- EJ and Public Participation programs cannot be successful when:
  - seen as unnecessary
  - perceived as a drain on resources
  - looked upon as a burden of distraction to environmental and other personnel

Persistence of an Erroneous Viewpoint

- Our informal survey found EJ and Public Participation programs:
  - seen as separate from the “real” work
  - can cause apprehension when an adversarial relationship exists
  - require skill sets that are beyond the technical training of program managers
  - compliance with the DoD Environmental Justice Public Participation Checklist should be sufficient

What Does This Mean and Why Should We Care

- **Managers must have the proper tools to perform their jobs successfully**
- **Cultural Competency Systems are necessary tools to successfully implement EJ and Public Participation programs**
- **The public WILL engage the military on issues they care about**
  - base closure and clean up
  - noise and other quality of life issues associated with ranges
  - impact on important wildlife

Cultural Competency Can Help Improve Programs

Cultural competency is defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that come together in a system enabling a department/agency or group of professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Cross, et al., 1989;Isaacs and Benjamin, 1991). In other words, it is a systematic approach to dealing with cross-cultural issues that can be measured and replicated, which should lead to sustainable EJ and Public Participation Programs. Operationally defined, cultural competence is the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies and practices used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes (Davis, 1997).

Cultural Competence is a Developmental Process

- **It occurs along a continuum**
- **There are six possibilities starting at one end and building towards the other**
  - cultural destructiveness
  - cultural incapacity
  - cultural blindness
  - cultural pre-competence
  - cultural competency
  - cultural proficiency
- **Operating in the first three zones invariably leads to adversarial relationships**

How to Become More Culturally Competent

- Value diversity
- Have capacity for cultural self-assessment
- Be conscious of cross-cultural dynamics
- Institutionalize cultural knowledge
- Reflect cultural diversity in products and services

Potential Components

- Cultural Knowledge
- Cultural Awareness
- Cultural Sensitivity

Existing Programs or Documents

- Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, Mental Health Program - Cultural Competence Standards in Managed Mental Health Care
- American Medical School Association - Cultural Competency Requirements for Medical School Accreditation
- Leadership Learning Community - Diversity and Multi-Culturalism Seminars
- Georgetown University Medical Center - National Center For Cultural Competency
- Annie E. Casey Foundation - Building Cultural Competency: A Toolkit For Workforce Development
- American Medical Association - Cultural Competence Compendium
- National Association of State Boards of Education - Cultural Competence and Public Education
- Kaiser Permanente - Cultural Competency in Managed Health Care

Getting Started

- Update existing EJ and Public Participation Programs
- Ensure key leadership are trained
- Network and dialogue with similar organizations
- Conduct a comprehensive cultural competency assessment
- Determine demographically diverse populations and their level of engagement
- Determine staff development needs
- Gather and organize resource materials
- Build and utilize a network of helpers and “experts”
- Solicit involvement by community members that reflects the demographics

Conclusion

- Cultural competency is a system the results of which should be measurable
- Implementation does not have to be complex or expensive but does require up-front planning
- It is a key ingredient to success of EJ and Public Participation programs
- Guidance should be provided by Headquarters to ensure consistency
- Program/system implementation must be local

For more information about this presentation or other public participation and/or EJ issues, please contact:

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